

# SOUTHEAST TEXAS REGION

## REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN



PREPARED FOR THE  
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
NOVEMBER 2006



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report was prepared by the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission. The work was reviewed and guided by an advisory group – the Steering Committee for the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan. Members of the Steering Committee provided valuable information, guided the planning efforts, and reviewed this report. The Steering Committee included:

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## INTRODUCTION

Public transportation is an integral component of a region's multimodal transportation system offering tangible transportation benefits, including transit service for the elderly, the disabled, and people lacking access to autos. Public transit also offers additional benefits to society as a whole; increased transit use promotes clean air and various other environmental initiatives. Coordination of these services will allow for greater efficiency, transportation connectivity, and increased awareness and support for transit.

Chapter 461 of House Bill (HB) 3588 mandates statewide coordination of public transportation services. Under this provision, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) must identify overlaps and inefficiencies in service by the transportation service provider. TxDOT has directed local public transportation providers to agree on the allocation of specific services and service areas. In efforts to cooperate with TxDOT in eliminating waste and ensuring efficiency and maximum coverage in the provision of public transportation services, the Southeast Texas region provides this Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan (RPTCP).



In addition to meeting the needs of HB 3588, the RPTCP is intended to become this region's coordination plan. The RPTCP for southeast Texas provides projects from a "coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan" as required by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

### ***Links to Federal Programs and Planning Requirements***

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was enacted in August 2005 as Public Law 109-59. SAFETEA-LU authorizes federal expenditures for a range of transportation programs, including transit. The SAFETEA-LU human services transportation coordination provisions require that transportation services optimize efficiency and effectiveness by ensuring that communities coordinate transportation provided through federal programs.

These federal programs are slated to achieve specific goals. In particular, SAFETEA-LU requires the establishment of a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan for all Federal Transit Association human service transportation programs, including: Section 5310 Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program, Section 5316 Job Access Reverse Commute Program, and Section 5317 New Freedom Program.

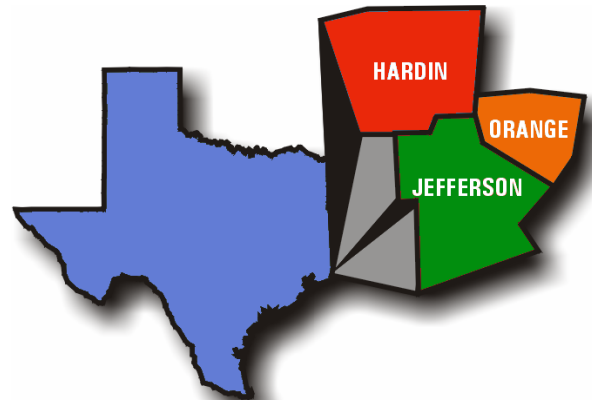
The RPTCP is a collaborative product that responds to the requirements laid out in SAFETEA-LU. The RPTCP was developed by a process that includes

representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers and participation by the public. The RPTCP is intended to become the southeast Texas' coordination plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Southeast Texas Planning Region***

The southeast Texas region is defined by the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) boundaries, including Jefferson, Orange, and Hardin Counties, as shown in Figure 1. The region comprised within the 2,155 square mile region is primarily rural. Urban areas include Beaumont and Port Arthur with several smaller surrounding towns.



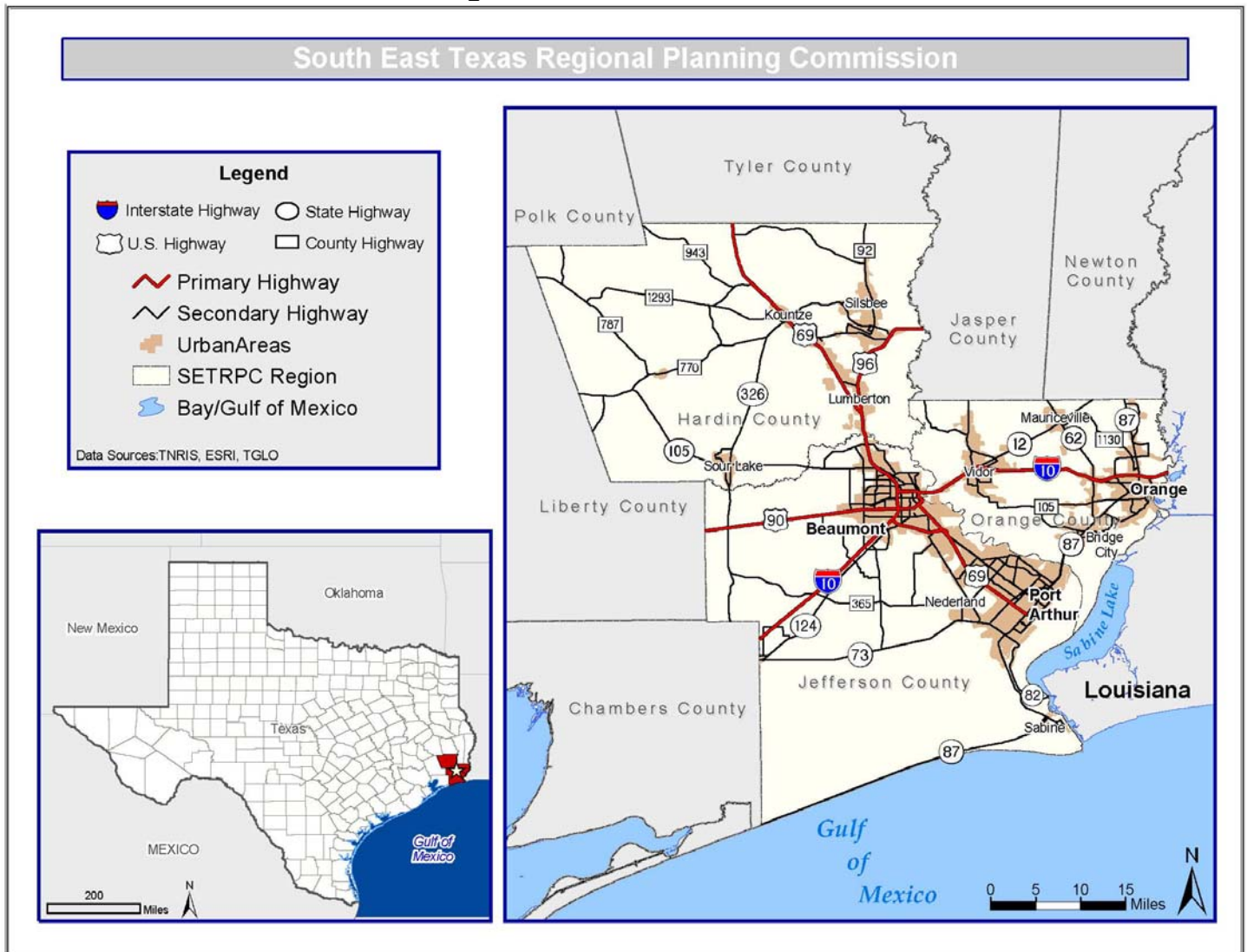
### **Demographics**

The total population of the southeast Texas region is estimated at 383,530, with the majority of people residing in Jefferson County. The population growth can be characterized as stable across the three counties, with Hardin County experiencing a slight increase over the past two decades. In particular, Lumberton gained 4,168 new residents from 1980 to 1990, an increase of 168 percent, and another 2,091 new residents, an increase of 31.5 percent, from 1990 to 2000.

The median age remains around 36 for each of the counties in the southeast Texas region, with 13 percent 65 and above. It is important to note that the percentage of the population 65 and above is growing across the region. Median household income for the region in 2003 averages approximately \$38,000, ranging from \$34,942 in Jefferson County to \$40,398 in Hardin County. All of the SETRPC counties exhibit increasing median household incomes over the past five years. For the same year, averages of 15 percent of persons were considered to be living in poverty.

Car ownership across the region is high, with a regional average of 93 percent of residents owning at least one vehicle. The percentage of residents without access to a vehicle ranges from 5.2 percent in Hardin County to 10.8 percent in Jefferson County.

**Figure 1. Southeast Texas**



**Table 1 Regional Demographic Outlook**

LOCATION	CATEGORY	YEAR			
		2000	2003*	2004*	2005*
<b>Hardin County</b>	Land Area	894.4			
	Population	48,073	49,538	50,218	50,976
	Age 65 or older	12.2%		12.5%	
	Median Age	36		36.5	
	Below Poverty Level	11.1%	12.5%		
	No Auto Ownership	5.2%			
<b>Jefferson County</b>	Land Area	903.6			
	Population	252,051	248,538	248,308	247,571
	Age 65 or older	13.6%		13.3%	
	Median Age	35.3		35.8	
	Below Poverty Level	16.3%	18.1%		
	No Auto Ownership	10.8%			
<b>Orange County</b>	Land Area	356.4			
	Population	84,966	84,520	84,725	84,983
	Age 65 or older	12.7%		13.2%	
	Median Age	36.1		37	
	Below Poverty Level	13.6%	14.5%		
	No Auto Ownership	7.5%			

\* Data for years 2003, 2004, and 2005 was not available for all categories.

Source: U.S. Census 2000.

### Planning Partners

The different agencies involved with planning efforts in the southeast Texas region include local, regional, and state entities that provide transportation, medical, workforce, and aging and disability assistance services.

The SETRPC acts as the lead planning partner for the southeast Texas region. Established in June 1970, it is a voluntary association of the local governments mentioned above. The SETRPC supplies comprehensive planning services in community development, transportation, and environmental resources. It also supports the Area Agency on Aging which coordinates several healthcare programs.

Within the transportation planning arena, the SETRPC staffs the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Jefferson-Orange-Hardin Transportation Study Area (JOHRTS). The principle purpose of the MPO is to provide an overall plan that will permit the most desirable and efficient means of meeting transportation needs for the next twenty years and ensure that the JOHRTS area complies with the rules and guidelines that the federal government requires in order to acquire federal funds for transportation improvements. The MPO is involved in daily activities associated with transportation planning and



provides support for the Transportation Planning Committee (TPC) and the Technical Committee. This support includes data collection, technical analysis, dispensing information, and recommending actions.

The SETRPC also offers planning support for community development and environmental resources. The community development department promotes a goal of building a stronger, more prosperous region, primarily through programs providing assistance to low-income individuals.

### Public Transportation Service Providers

Public transportation in the southeast Texas region includes primarily demand-response service, with two localities managing fixed-route systems. Table 2 identifies the transportation providers within the region. The major transportation providers are described in greater detail below.

Fixed Route Providers include:

- Beaumont Municipal Transit
- Port Arthur Transit



The fixed-route systems serve the larger urban areas of Beaumont and Port Arthur. Beaumont Municipal Transit (BMT) operates nine local routes from 6:00 am to approximately 9:30pm six days a week. Transit routes all converge at the BMT transfer facility in downtown Beaumont to allow for easy transfers to other routes. Port Arthur Transit (PAT) also offers regular citywide bus services with eleven local routes. PAT operates from 6:15am to 6:15pm five days a week. Annual ridership for BMT totaled 671,420 fixed route and 22,155 demand response trips in 2005, while PAT ridership reached 116,632 fixed route and 20,446 demand response trips during the same year. Both BMT and PAT operate specialized door-to-door transportation for the disabled who qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, PAT provides specialized door-to-door transportation for the elderly.

Demand-response service is offered by a variety of agencies. Demand-Response Providers include:

- South East Texas Transit
- American Medical Response
- Orange Community Action Association
- Nutrition and Services for Seniors
- ABC Transit
- Orange County Transportation



The SETRPC takes a regional approach to public transportation by managing South East Texas Transit (SETT), which is a curb-to-curb demand-response system to people residing in non-urbanized areas for healthcare, shopping, social services, employment, education, and recreational needs. SETT is comprised of the Orange County Transportation (OCT), Orange Community Action Association (OCAA), and Nutrition and Services for Seniors (NSS).

American Medical Response (AMR) is a private, for-profit company contracted with the TDOT to provide medical transportation for eligible recipients of Texas Department of Health and Human Services Medicaid assistance program. AMR subcontracts its transportation services in Hardin, Jefferson, and Orange Counties to NSS and ABC Transit.

OCT supplies curb-to-curb transportation five days a week from 7:30am until 5:00pm for residents of Orange County.

The non-profit organizations, NSS and the OCAA, provide transportation for residents in the rural areas of the southeast Texas. NSS supplies low cost transit for residents in North Jefferson and Hardin counties for medical appointments, dialysis, prescriptions, groceries, recreation, work, and other needed stops. OCAA primarily supplies transportation for persons within Orange city limits, but on occasion provides transportation outside the city limits. OCAA offers transportation for shopping, medical, work, education, and any other purpose.

ABC Transit is a private, for-profit transit provider for the region and operates a demand-response service for the general public. The general service operates Monday through Saturday, 5:00am to 7:00pm ABC Transit also provides transportation on Sunday for trips to the Southeast Texas Regional Airport.



**Table 2 Southeast Texas Public Transportation Providers**

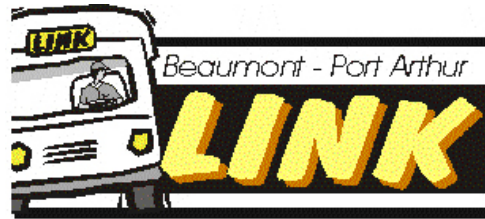
Provider	Service Area	Hours	Services	Eligibility
Beaumont Municipal Transit	Beaumont	Mon-Fri 6am-9:30pm; Sat 7:30am-9:30pm	Fixed Route	General
Beaumont Municipal Transit - Special Transit Services	Beaumont	Mon-Fri 6am-9:30pm; Sat 7:30am-9:30pm	Demand Response	Disabled
Port Arthur Transit - ADA Paratransit Services	Port Arthur	Mon-Fri. 6:15am-6:15pm	Demand Response	Elderly and Disabled
Port Arthur Transit	Port Arthur	Mon-Fri. 6:15am-6:15pm	Fixed Route	General
South East Texas Transit (SETT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NSS</li> <li>OCAA</li> <li>Orange County Transportation</li> </ul>	Rural Jefferson, Hardin (except Lumberton), and Orange Counties <sup>1,2</sup>	Various – see subcontractors schedules	Demand Response	General
American Medical Response <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ABC Transit</li> <li>NSS</li> </ul>	Jefferson, Hardin, and Orange	Various – see subcontractors schedules	Medicaid <sup>3</sup>	Medicaid
Orange County Transportation	Vidor <sup>1</sup>	Mon-Fri. 6:30am-5pm	Demand Response	General
	Orange	Mon-Fri. 7am-5pm	Demand Response	General
Nutrition and Services for Seniors (NSS)	Hardin County, <sup>4</sup> Rural Jefferson County and Mid-County	Mon-Fri. 6am-7pm	Demand Response	General; Elderly and Disabled <sup>5</sup>
Orange Community Action Association (OCAA)	City of Orange	Mon-Fri. 8am-5pm	Demand Response	General and Elderly <sup>6</sup>
ABC Transit	Jefferson, Hardin, and Orange	Mon-Sat. 5am – 7pm Sundays <sup>7</sup>	General	General
Hardin County Health & Welfare	Hardin County	Mon-Fri. 6am-5:30pm	Medical	Income requirements
Jefferson County Health & Welfare	Jefferson County	Tues-Fri. 6am-4pm	Medical	Income requirements

1. Rural Vidor transportation service is provided by Orange County Transportation and is partially funded with 5311 federal and state funds through a subcontract with SETT. Urban Vidor transportation service is funded with Orange County monies only.
2. NSS provides Hardin County's rural transportation services using 5311 funds for rural areas, as a subcontractor to SETT. Lumberton receives transportation services from NSS under separate funds.
3. ABC Transit Medicaid transit users are for Jefferson County, Hardin County (into or from Jefferson County), and Orange County, as well as long distance trips to Galveston and Houston. NSS Medicaid transit users are for Hardin County.
4. NSS provides Hardin County's rural transportation services using 5311 funds for rural areas, as a subcontractor to SETT. Lumberton receives transportation services from NSS under separate funds.
5. NSS provides transportation in Jefferson County (Mid-County only) for the elderly and disabled using 5310 funds. For Hardin County, NSS uses Title 3 funds for elderly only; Title 3 funds are received from the Area Agency on Aging through a subcontract.
6. OCAA receives Title 3 funds from the Area Agency on Aging through a subcontract.
7. ABC Transit provides Sunday services to the Southeast Texas Regional Airport only.

### ***History of Regional Coordination of Public Transportation***

In the southeast Texas region, coordination is occurring on different levels and being spearheaded by the SETRPC.

A previous coordination project that was widely discussed during this planning process was The LINK, initiated by the SETRPC in August 2001. The LINK connected the Beaumont and Port Arthur fixed-route services. It operated with



provider buses and averaged about 70 rides per month; however, the project was terminated in July 2003 due to low ridership and the unavailability of continued funding.

The (JOHRTS) area Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) Transportation Study identified opportunities that would likely improve the transportation network in the region. The study explored program coordination opportunities by meeting and working with the Texas Workforce Development Board and its partner agencies, the SETRPC, BMT, PAT, SETT, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants and case managers, and regional county business leaders.

The SETRPC is involved in most of the public transportation coordination projects in the region. The SETRPC website provides a central resource for information on many of the available transportation services for the region. The SETRPC also operates SETT, as described above. In summer 2002, the SETRPC, in partnership with NSS, implemented the Mid-County Transit Pilot Project service for the cities of Nederland, Port Neches, and Groves. This Pilot Project provides subscription service to the elderly and disabled residents in these smaller cities. It currently averages about 825 one-way trips per month.

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan – 2030 (MTP) also presents the idea of increased collaboration between transit agencies and providers. It discusses the restoration of the service linking Beaumont and Port Arthur routes and the need for dialogue between the SETRPC, transit providers, roadway system providers such as TxDOT, counties and cities.

### **REGIONAL SERVICE COORDINATION PLANNING**

The planning process for the RPTCP involved the lead agency, Steering Committee, stakeholders, interested organizations, and the general public. All entities were invited to participate in planning for coordinating regional transportation services.

#### ***Lead Agency***

The SETRPC was designated as the lead agency for these efforts. In 1974, the Governor of Texas designated the SETRPC as the MPO for Jefferson, Orange,

and Hardin Counties. As the MPO, the SETRPC is responsible for conducting comprehensive, coordinated, and continuing long-range transportation planning in the three-county region. The SETRPC will effectively serve as lead agency for the regional public transportation coordination plan.

### ***Steering Committee***

The Steering Committee was created to provide guidance to the lead agency on the planning process, provide a voice for their agency/organization, and become an advocate for the RPTCP.

The Steering Committee consists of people from public transportation providers, interested organizations, local officials, and state agencies. Specifically, the Steering Committee consists of individuals from:

- Nutrition and Services for Seniors
- City of Port Arthur/ Port Arthur Transit
- Texas Department of Transportation – Beaumont District
- Texas Workforce Development Board
- Hardin County /City of Sour Lake
- Orange County Transportation
- Beaumont Municipal Transit
- South East Texas Transit
- Coastal Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
- ABC Transit
- Catholic Charities
- Texas Department of Health & Human Services
- Advocacy Incorporated
- Area Agency on Aging
- Partnership of Southeast Texas
- Interested / General Public
- Jefferson County Housing Authority
- Orange County Economic Development Corporation
- Spindletop Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR)

The initial Steering Committee meeting was held on April 28, 2006. The purpose of this meeting was to identify the mission of the Steering Committee. The meeting included an update from the lead agency (SETRPC) on the planning process, data collection efforts, and public involvement activities. It also served as an opportunity for the Steering Committee to provide comments and suggestions on the remainder of the data collection process, including the distribution and analysis of the provider and public surveys.

The second Steering Committee meeting was held on July 14, 2006. This meeting focused on the process for identifying barriers and constraints to

transportation coordination in southeast Texas. Discussion items also included: synopsis of the Best Practices Roundtable; Steering Committee responsibilities; and critical dates in the planning process.

The third Steering Committee meeting was held on August 31, 2006. The purpose of this meeting was to review the results of the barrier and constraint forms, provide transit services survey results, and initiate discussion on potential opportunities for further coordination by addressing the said barriers and constraints.

The Steering Committee received copies of this document during the draft stage for review and comment. A Steering Committee meeting was also held on November 29, 2006 to resolve any outstanding issues on this plan and move forward with an Action / Implementation Strategy. Upon completion of this plan in December 2006, the Steering Committee will remain an active advocate for public transportation coordination in the region.

### **General Meetings**

There have been four general meetings associated with this planning process. These meetings were held in February, August, and November (2005); March and most recently August (2006).

The general meetings were open to the public, stakeholders, and interested organizations and agencies. Meeting discussions have included selecting the SETRPC as the lead agency, recommending a strategy for this planning process, discussing items to be included with the transportation services survey, and providing updates on guidance given by TxDOT. In addition, the August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006 meeting served as an opportunity for stakeholders and interested parties to contribute to the identification of barriers and constraints to transportation coordination and discuss opportunities for solutions.

### **Outreach / Public Involvement**

The outreach efforts of this coordination planning process attempted to include and educate as many people within the region as possible. This included three rounds of public meetings, with a number of meetings in geographically diverse locations for each meeting round. Extensive notification and distributed publications were included for each round of public meetings.

South East Texas Regional Planning Commission needs your perspective.

**Your input is an important piece of the puzzle!**

Come share your thoughts on transit needs and issues in our area.

The South East Texas Regional Planning Commission (SETRPC) is the lead agency in preparing the area's Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan. Please join us at one of the meetings shown at left as we discuss the Plan and solicit your input on how we can work together to best serve the transportation needs of the citizens of southeast Texas.

For more information on the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan, the upcoming public meetings or special needs requests, please contact Bob Dickinson at (409) 899-8444 extension 251 or [bdickinson@setrpc.org](mailto:bdickinson@setrpc.org)

**MEETING DATES –**

- Monday, October 30**  
Lumberton - Intermediate School  
107 North LHS Drive  
Lumberton, TX  
5:00 PM
- Tuesday, October 31**  
SETRPC Offices - Swan Room  
2210 Eastex Freeway  
Beaumont, TX  
4:00 PM
- Thursday, November 2**  
West Orange City Hall  
2700 Western Avenue  
West Orange, TX  
5:00 PM
- Monday, November 6**  
Port Arthur Transit Transfer Center  
320 Dallas Avenue  
Port Arthur, TX  
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

The SETRPC held four public meetings from April 4th through 6th, 2006 in the three counties of the region, including Port Arthur and Beaumont (Jefferson County), Lumberton (Hardin County), and Orange (Orange County). The public meetings were advertised in the local newspapers and mailed notices were sent to stakeholders and interested parties.

The second round of public meetings occurred during the month of July 2006. These meetings were held in Jefferson County, Port Arthur and Beaumont, Hardin County, and Orange County. Public notification for the second round of public meetings included advertisement in local newspapers, mailed notices sent to stakeholders and interested parties, announcement on the lead agency web site, and flyers distributed to transit providers and at prominent transit user locations.

A third round of public meetings was held in geographically diverse locations during the first week of November 2006. Public notification for the third round of public meetings included advertisement in local newspapers, mailed notices sent to stakeholders and interested parties, announcement on the lead agency web site, and flyers distributed to transit providers and prominent transit user locations.

The purpose of these public meetings was to engage the public in the planning process concerning public transportation coordination and introduce the purpose of the Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan, as mandated by HB 3588. In addition to providing information about the project, the project team provided the Transit Services Survey and conducted interviews of the attendants for the data collection.

## **COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

### ***Goals, Objectives, and Planning Strategy***

The goals and objectives for the RPTCP, as well as, the southeast Texas region's planning strategy, were established through discussions with the stakeholders, affected agencies, and transit providers during the early stages of the plan. Most of the discussions were also held at the general meetings, as described above.

The goals and objectives for southeast Texas incorporated the intent of HB 3588 (eliminate waste, generate efficiencies, and reduce air pollution) and placed it into the regional needs for transportation coordination. The specific goals for the RPTCP include:<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The goals and objectives for the RPTCP were presented and discussed at the General Meeting on March 3, 2006.



- Determine type of service needed
- Identify users and why they need or use transit services
- Identify constraints for service and coordination between providers
- Discover existing education and awareness on public transportation services
- Create an understanding and environment for enhanced coordination opportunities

The objectives for each goal were incorporated into the tasks for the planning strategy. The planning strategy was described in detail in the *Strategy for Regional Transportation Coordination* report submitted to TxDOT in October 2005. The planning strategy for southeast Texas can be found in Appendix A. Essential elements to the strategy included data collection, transit services survey, public involvement process, determination of barriers and constraints, recommending a coordination plan, and preparing an action plan.

### ***Regional Needs Assessment***

#### **Transit Services Survey**

The Transit Services Survey was done in two parts. One survey was focused on gaining knowledge from the public on their experience working with transit services and transportation agencies and organizations. Another survey was prepared to use as guidance in talking with and interviewing providers on their provided services and requested suggestions for coordination.

Survey content was discussed at the general meeting on March 3, 2006. The surveys were created and finalized by April 4, 2006 in order to have them for the public meetings. The surveys were conducted May through July 2006.



The responses from the Transit Services Survey established a framework for developing the barriers and constraints prohibiting transportation coordination and the opportunities for enhanced coordination in the southeast Texas region. The Transportation Providers Survey acknowledged what the transportation providers view as the main obstacles for coordination. The Public Survey identified the main inconveniences and difficulties with using the existing transportation system.

Appendices A and B of the *Report on Barriers and Constraints to Coordination* provide the survey instruments and detailed findings of the Transit Services Survey.



## Operational Assessment

An operational assessment was conducted to gain a general understanding of the operational context within which the area's transit services are provided, including the size of each entity, the scale of services provided, the funding sources employed, and the productivity of the services. This knowledge contributed to an appreciation of the opportunities and challenges faced in achieving better-coordinated, more effective transit within the three-county area.

Examining the operations data offered no obvious ways in which enhanced coordination would improve the productivity or cost effectiveness of the service providers. It is probable; however, that benefits would accrue from more effective coordination.

For example, the service for persons whose travel cross provider service boundaries could be improved by scheduling vehicles to meet at a prescribed location and time to accommodate passenger

transfers. This may be a challenge to service efficiency, but it could attract more riders, thereby improving mobility for transit users and productivity for the providers. The emerging availability of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) applications could facilitate such service refinements, which otherwise could be too complex to manage effectively.

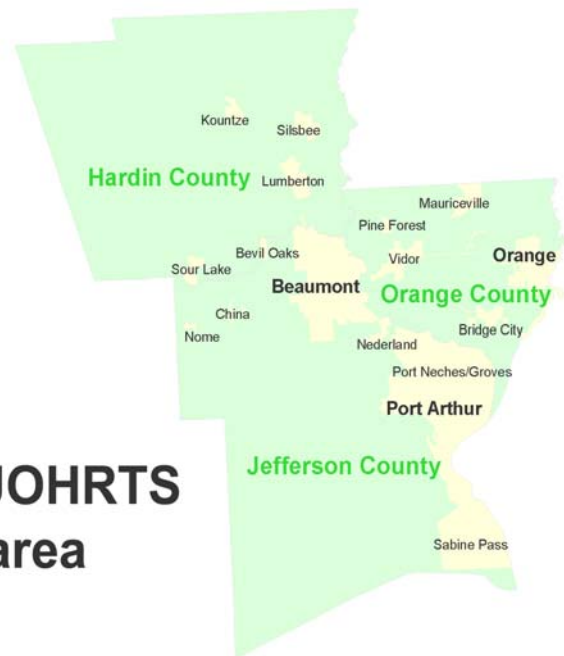
An alternative way of addressing multi-jurisdiction travel would be to arrange joint operation of services that satisfy such travel demands with a one-seat ride; however, this solution would require resolution of the legal and administrative restraints that currently prohibit such operations.

In addition, the re-establishing of the connection between BMT and PAT service areas could be beneficial. A demand response service might be a cost-effective approach.

### ***Barriers, Constraints, and Opportunities***

The process for identifying the barriers and constraints to coordination and opportunities for coordination in southeast Texas included compiling existing transportation service information and working with transportation providers through a series of meetings and interviews, as well as working with the Steering

**The JOHRTS  
area**



Committee. For the purposes of this study, a barrier would be considered a statute, agency regulation, or funding policy that hinders transportation coordination; a constraint is considered historical practice, misinformation, transportation myths, assumptions, institutional conflicts, or personality conflicts. Opportunities are circumstances suitable for achievement of enhanced coordination throughout the region.

### Barriers and Constraints

The priority barriers and constraints to transportation coordination facing southeast Texas are identified below. A complete list of the barriers and constraints for southeast Texas can be found in the *Report on Barriers and Constraints to Coordination*. By addressing these priority barriers and constraints, there would be significant positive impacts on the customers, the providers, and the region. Although difficult to quantify the positive impact with a dollar amount, the elimination of these barriers and constraints would lead to better service and productivity.

#### Priority Barriers:

- **Funding** – State and Federal funding is inadequate to bridge service gaps. Transit providers are utilizing all available funds to pay for operating costs and often have little money for maintenance of aging vehicles or additional drivers. There is concern about the ability of transit providers to maintain current service levels due to increased costs of fuel, workers compensation, vehicle insurance, and other operational costs. In addition to preserving services, the funding barrier is compounded with definition and restructuring of US Census Bureau boundaries. Rural and urban areas qualify for different funding programs, and the change in classification of an area (for example, from rural to urban) according to the US Census effects program eligibility. In southeast Texas, a community that was receiving funds for rural transportation services greatly reduced services offered (due to funding constraints) once the community became part of the urbanized area.
- **Jurisdictional** (Urban / Rural trip boundaries) – The southeast Texas region includes both urban and rural areas. The urban and rural boundaries dictate the extent of public transportation in some cases. Urban transportation providers cannot go beyond the urbanized boundary areas; whereas rural transportation providers can transport into the city, but cannot start trips within the urban area. In addition, as described above, the US Census boundaries for rural and urban areas may determine the type of services provided.
- **Promote Alternative Fuel Vehicles (AFV)** – In southeast Texas, there are limited suppliers of propane, as well as a limited number of local mechanics qualified to work on AFVs. When vehicles require service, they are often sent to Houston, which results in significant down time. The AFV regulations, enforced by TxDOT, could be expanded to promote the

building of refueling infrastructure and locally qualified mechanic service centers. These changes would greatly enhance the promotion of and ability to use AFV.

#### Priority Constraints:

- **Lack of Communication Between Transportation Agencies** – Each provider abides by rules established for individual programs. Little or no communication between agencies occurs regarding services offered; therefore, the agencies are not aware of other agencies' services. Due to this lack of communication and knowledge of other services, the agencies are not able to provide optimal service for the client. Before coordination can take place, communication and awareness are essential.
- **Lack of Interagency Support** – Some of the transportation services being offered overlap with services offered by another provider. When this occurs, providers should work together to establish the most efficient service for clients.
- **Lack of Organized Coordination** – The transportation agencies are interested in coordination and achieving a seamless system of transportation throughout the region, but there is currently no direction on how to accomplish this task. There is a need for regional guidelines instructing agencies on what they *need* to do in order to work with the other agencies and produce a higher quality service.

#### Opportunities for Coordination

The results of the Transit Services Survey, the input from the Steering Committee, evaluation of the data collected, and the barriers and constraints identified distinguish two key opportunities for coordination of transportation services for the goal of working towards a seamless transportation network. These opportunities are as follows:

- **Awareness** - Most meetings and interviews came back to the issue of lack of awareness by potential transit users and transit providers. The need for awareness extends beyond educating the public and providers on what is available in the transportation network.
- **Connectivity** - The lack of connectivity between the rural and urban systems, as well as between urban centers presents an opportunity for improving the regional transportation system. Connectivity can be improved through coordination between the rural and urban transportation providers.



## **ACTION PLAN**

The Action Plan consists of projects that were developed as a potential solution to coordination obstacles and opportunities for enhanced coordination. The identified action items include realistic projects that could be implemented and evaluated. The projects were born out of need and desire to eliminate the constraints identified through this planning process and meet the goals and objectives of enhanced transportation coordination for southeast Texas.

### Transit Development Plan and Evaluation of Services

A Transit Development Plan is needed to investigate current and future conditions, identify current strengths and weaknesses, and consider possible actions to assure a stable supply of transit sufficient to address mobility needs. The plan would discover if services could be strengthened in ways to better serve existing and potential users and identify potential for specific transit policy. The plan would further explore opportunities to enhance coordination efforts between the major transit providers in Beaumont, Port Arthur, and other public and private transportation providers in the region.

A possible project that would be involved with this program would be to evaluate extending service to IH 10/ Walden Road currently experiencing growth and development of hotels and restaurants. A second project in accordance with this program would be to evaluate the provision of holiday shopping opportunities as part of a seasonal route extension verses a full-time route modification.

### Transportation Outreach Coordinator

A solution for creating awareness among the public and providers would be to employ a Transportation Outreach Coordinator who would coordinate and understand the regional transportation system and extend that knowledge to others involved. This position would work with regional communities on the perception and education of public transportation by creating a single point of contact and clearinghouse for regional transportation information and description of services. In addition, this position would maintain and distribute customer awareness materials and be a key contact for providing transportation customer service throughout the region.

A function of the Transportation Outreach Coordinator position would be to maintain the knowledge of the rural and urban systems so that a rural system could coordinate with the urban system when a client is in town for an appointment. The urban system could be used for inter-urban trips, and the rural system could provide transportation to and from the rural/urban area.

SETRPC would be the lead agency to work with this position and provide the necessary support. SETRPC is currently evaluating a strategy and program implementation on moving forward with creating this position.

### Enhance Public Transportation Awareness

Develop and implement an education program which would provide information to customers and transit providers on transportation services throughout the region. This program could be lead by the Transportation Outreach Coordinator Position and would allow the public and providers to learn about the options available to grant users greater mobility. This program would include an extensive marketing and promotional effort. SETRPC has aggressively begun the efforts of actively pursuing this program throughout the region. Possible projects under this program may include a comprehensive education program and a project giving transportation education programs at schools.

### Enhance Elderly and Disabled Services in Southeast Texas

Currently, there is no Section 5310 program for elderly and disabled persons in Hardin and Orange Counties. Addition of these services, through agreements with local providers, would provide increased mobility, improve access, minimize duplication of services, and facilitate a more effective resource for qualified persons in the region. Possible projects for expanding transportation services for the elderly may include implementing trip vouchers, which would help achieve a seamless transportation network.

### Enhance Mobility for Disabled Persons

Hardin, Orange, and select areas of Jefferson Counties do not offer specific services for disabled persons. Acquiring funds under the New Freedom program will enhance transportation opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including transportation to and from jobs and employment support services. Through local agreements with providers, the mobility for disabled persons would be enhanced in the Southeast Texas region.



### Enhanced Services

Additional Section 5311 funding would provide an opportunity for enhancing availability for scheduling trips and services provided, through local agreements with local providers, throughout the region.

### Pilot Service between major urban centers

Service between Beaumont and Port Arthur does not exist at this time; however, service is needed. It was continually voiced by the social service agencies and the public that this service is desired and considered necessary. A pilot service, possibly a demand-response service offered several times a week, may be the solution. This pilot service would be different from the previously described The LINK service; this pilot project would not be a fixed-route service and would operate only at select times and days. It is recommended that an additional study be conducted to determine how to solve this problem.

### Pilot Service between rural and urban centers

Programs between rural and urban centers, including regional universities and major employers should be provided through a pilot service. It was continually voiced by the social service agencies and the public that this service is desired and considered necessary between the rural areas and urban areas. A pilot service, possibly a demand-response service offered several times a week, may be the solution. It is recommended that an additional study be conducted to determine how to solve this problem.

### Express bus service for major employers or concentrated centers

There is a service gap for supplying express transportation for concentrated areas of housing and employment throughout the southeast Texas region. In particular, the regional economic development indicates that short-term contract employees (and employers) will have a demand for such service in the near-term. Opportunities for possible express bus services to meet this need should be reviewed and studied. Possible projects include an express bus service which extends from one county into another. In addition to employment centers, Lamar University maintains a concentrated center for students, particularly during evening hours for classes, and may also require additional transportation services that are not currently being provided.

### Pilot Programs for Non-Traditional Transportation Services and Hours

The Southeast Texas region would benefit from other types of transportation services and hours. The opportunity for vanpooling and park-n-rides with major employers should be enacted through various pilot programs and services. Some of these programs could be incorporated into the express bus service project mentioned above. Other projects include more frequent intervals of services; providing transportation service outside of business hours; providing transportation to regional recreational events; and providing service on all weekdays, including the weekends.

### Organized Coordination Team

Continued opportunities for openness and communication are crucial to ensuring the success of the RPTCP. The Steering Committee and Lead Agency should remain active beyond the adoption of the RPTCP to continue advocating for coordination. SETRPC should remain as Lead Agency for transportation coordination, given its role and purpose in the region.

### Study for an Expanded Network of Shared Stops

It is recommended that a study be conducted to determine opportunities for an expanded network of shared stops and transfer points. An expanded network of stops would help create a



more seamless transportation system and help overcome jurisdictional boundaries.

### Regional Standards of Customer Care

It is recommended to create regional, cross-agency standards of customer care to which all providers can agree and adhere. This will help break down concerns among providers in sharing users and break down trust issues. A possible project many include training programs for providers on passenger assistance to extend customer care above and beyond what ADA requires to provide “door-through-door” services.

### Enhanced Coordination with the Texas Workforce Development Board

Enhanced coordination with the Texas Workforce Development Board labor force training to fill employer needs for alternative fuel vehicle service and maintenance would meet the growing need for this labor force and would provide increased opportunities for Texas Workforce Development Board clientele.

### Operational Projects

Several of the recommendations already listed provide means to explore, plan, and implement improvements that will enhance the operational effectiveness of the transit services within the three-county area. The preparation of a Transit Development Plan will provide the opportunity to examine alternative ways of providing and coordinating service, optimizing transit use, and improving the productivity of the area’s transit services. The establishment of a Transit Outreach Coordinator position could provide a foundation for providing information to passengers and for planning and scheduling services to achieve optimal efficiency for both passengers and operators. The introduction of ITS applications to aid in providing passenger information, service planning, and service scheduling, dispatching, and monitoring could have valuable benefits.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Project Implementation and Prioritization***

Implementation of the projects listed above will create a more seamless public transportation system that achieves efficiency, eliminates waste, and increases coordination to address gaps in service.

Once the project list was established, criteria for prioritization of projects were applied to determine which projects should be implemented first. The criteria for prioritization included: cost; funds required versus funds available; ease of implementation; time to implement; needed before some other project can go forward; and equitable treatment of participants and beneficiaries.

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<sup>2</sup> See ITS Applications for Coordinating and Improving Human Services Transportation, USDOT, August 2006.



A relative “benefit” and “cost” are measured for each project, in addition to the criteria described above, as identified in Table 7. The criteria have been estimated and measured as “high,” “moderate,” or “low.” The table also identifies the constraint being targeted by the proposed action and whether a funding or policy change is required for implementation of said project.

Top priority projects to meet the goals of regional transportation coordination include projects that improve and enhance current providers and services, as well as extend and embrace public educational awareness and outreach.

**Table 7 Action Plan Project Implementation Prioritization**

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Funds Required</b>	<b>Ease of Implementation</b>	<b>Needed prior to other Projects</b>	<b>Funding / Policy Change Required</b>	<b>Target Constraint</b>
Transit Development Plan	High	High	Y	Moderate	Y	Y	Lack of Interagency Support
Transportation Outreach Coordinator	High	Moderate	Y	Low	Y	N	Lack of Communication; Organized Coordination; and Public Awareness
Enhanced Public Transportation Awareness and Outreach	High	Moderate	Y	Low	Y	N	Lack of Communication; Organized Coordination; and Public Awareness
Enhance Elderly and Disabled Services in southeast Texas	High	Moderate	Y	High	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Enhance Mobility for Disabled Persons	High	Moderate	Y	High	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Enhance Transportation Services	Moderate	High	Y	High	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Pilot Service between Urban Centers	High	High	Y	Moderate	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Pilot Service between Rural and Urban centers	High	High	Y	Moderate	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Express Bus Service	Moderate	High	Y	High	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Funds Required</b>	<b>Ease of Implementation</b>	<b>Needed Prior to Other Projects</b>	<b>Funding/ Policy Change Required</b>	<b>Target Constraint</b>
Pilot Programs for Non-Traditional Transportation Services	Moderate	High	Y	High	N	Y	Limited Transportation Services
Organized Coordination Team	High	Low	N	Low	Y	N	Lack of Communication
Study for Expanded Network of Shared Stops	Moderate	Moderate	Y	Moderate	Y	N	Lack of Organized Coordination
Regional Standards for Customer Care	Moderate	Low	N	Moderate	N	Y	Territorial Concerns
Enhanced Coordination with the Texas Workforce Development Board	Moderate	Low	N	Moderate	N	N	Alternative Fuel Vehicles
Improved Operations Strategies; ITS-aided Central Management of Transit Services	High	Moderate	Y	Moderate	N	Y	Territorial Concerns; Funding

### ***Action Plan Evaluation***

The lead agency will focus on direct implementation and monitoring results of the Action Plan with updates and status of activities presented to the Steering Committee to ensure that the results and project process are consistent with the original direction of the plan. Each project will establish an anticipated schedule and coordination milestones at the onset of being implemented.

Documentation of the Action Plan projects should occur throughout the project's process and be shared with the Steering Committee. Communication on the project's process should also be shared with agencies affected by coordination and through a medium (i.e. website) that allows public participation. The activities of the Action Plan should be available for comment by the Steering Committee, stakeholders, and general public.

### ***Coordination Plan Continuation Strategies***

The sustainability of transportation coordination in southeast Texas depends upon continued communication among transit providers, regional stakeholders, and social service agencies. The action item projects listed above relies on this coordination for successful implementation.

### **Schedule and Plan Update Process**

The projects identified in the Action Plan are recommended to be implemented over the next two to three years, assuming adequate funding is in place to accomplish the indicated projects. It is recommended that an annual program be developed for regional public transportation coordination planning. The coordination planning process will be an ongoing series of events, meetings, and implemented projects.

The timeline for updating the RPTCP will be based on the results of the implemented projects, guidance from the Steering Committee and lead agency, and progress of transportation coordination throughout the region. The annual program for regional public transportation coordination planning will ensure that this is a "living" document, meaning that it sustains the goal of coordination, but allows for changing operational, economic, and social issues within the region. Review and update to the RPTCP should occur once the Action Plan, including priority projects, has had an opportunity to show results or if the goals and objectives and implementation priorities have changed. The continuation of the organized coordination team (Steering Committee and lead agency) will oversee that the implementation actions and continued planning maintain these efforts.

It is recommended that the Steering Committee and lead agency adopt a schedule to review the RPTCP every two years. The results of the review will provide recommendations for plan updates. As a minimum, the RPTCP should be reviewed for update every five years.

# APPENDIX A

## STRATEGY FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION

## **APPENDIX A – STRATEGY FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION FOR SOUTHEAST TEXAS**

The objectives for each goal were incorporated into the tasks for the planning strategy. The planning strategy was described in detail in the *Strategy for Regional Coordination Transit Plan* submitted to the Texas Transportation Commission in October 2005. The planning strategy included:

### **Task 1.0 Gather Data on Existing Conditions for Transportation Service and Coordination**

- Demographic review of persons using transit services/having transit needs
- Inventory of all public and private non-profit transportation resources, including: equipment; operating expenses; and support personnel
- Evaluate current, if any, transportation service coordination efforts by area health and social service agencies and transportation service providers

### **Subtask 1.1 Transit Services Survey**

- Identify users, location of users and non-users, and determine if and why the service is used (if provided)
- Identify riders who do not necessarily fit in an agency group or funding category
- Survey the knowledge/education of transit services available
- Identify whether need for service is perceived or real
- Categorize the need for service

### **Task 2.0 Determine Gaps, Barriers, and Procedures effecting Transportation Service and Coordination**

- Identify and analyze current service deficiencies, gaps, and barriers that exist, in addition to identifying any obstacles that prevent coordination on transit services
- Identify any opportunities for further coordination
- Identify and evaluate transportation needs that can be addressed through coordination

### **Task 3.0 Recommend a Coordination Model for the SETRPC**

- Evaluate and address the service deficiencies, gaps, barriers, and opportunities for coordination
- Develop a detailed Action Plan

- Develop monitoring and evaluation criteria

#### Task 4.0 Implement Regional Public Transportation Coordination Action Plan

- Select key projects that are most likely to demonstrate success
- Monitor and evaluate the Transportation Coordination Action Plan.

#### Task 5.0 Community Outreach and Meetings

- A minimum of three meetings in geographically diverse areas will be held at crucial stages of the planning process to discuss and obtain input on data collection, analysis, and progress.
- Involvement of meetings will be open to all interested parties including, but not limited to, rural transit providers, transit agencies, private providers, TxDOT, and advocates of special interests.